

UNKNOW THYSELF: APOPHATICISM, DECONSTRUCTION, AND THEOLOGY AFTER ONTOTHEOLOGY

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Whoever will be poor in spirit, he must be poor of all his own knowledge, so that he knows nothing, not God or created things or himself.¹

I. Ground-Setting: Denials

One wonders why, after thirty-five years, the question of “apophaticism’s” relation to “deconstruction” has not been put to rest. After all, the author himself has issued the final word: “No, what I write is not ‘negative theology.’”² While he acknowledges a certain “family resemblance”³ between these pre- and post-modern radical negativities, the father of *différance* ultimately says “no”. “No, I would hesitate to inscribe what I put forward under the familiar heading of negative theology.”⁴ Why does this not satisfy us? Why are we not satisfied with this “not”? Perhaps, as good post-Freudian readers, we are suspicious of denial, particularly when it is so vigorous, not to mention frequent: “those aspects of *différance* which are thereby delineated are not theological, not even in the order of the most negative of negative theologies.”⁵ Perhaps we are less likely than ever before to take a “word” as “final”, even if—*especially* if—uttered by the “author himself”, or, for that matter, his translator: “Let me add yet once again that this terrifying and exhilarating vertigo is not ‘mystical’ or ‘theological.’”⁶ Why not rest with this not? Could it be because a not with which we might rest would not be a

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proper not? "Once again, it is not theological."⁷ Why do we keep asking him? Could it be because we know that any proper not could never be properly not? Could it be, above all, because *this is how he has taught us to think*? Yet once again, he insists, "this formulation is not theological, as one might believe somewhat hastily".⁸ How dare he say not? How could the post-structuralist prophet of *denégation* ever attempt to end the play of negativity, regulating signification in a manner reminiscent of the ontotheological Author Himself?

Is *différance* negative theology? "No," says the author. "No . . . not . . . no."⁹ But then the characteristic Gallic shrug. "No." Pause. Shrug. "Except. . . ." "Nothing in such a discourse strikes me as more alien to negative theology. . . . *And yet*, as often happens, this infinite distance is also an infinitesimal distance."¹⁰ Is *différance* negative theology? "It is and it is not. It is above all not."¹¹ Above all, it is not. And yet *différance*, which neither affirms nor negates but functions "above all not", ensures that ultimately no "not" can be above all.

And so this essay marks another attempt to bring into conversation two discursive strategies that try to get "above all not". There is no question that "negative theology" and "deconstruction" bear remarkable resemblances to one another; one could begin by noting the resistance of each to facile definition, necessitating constant re-marking of their boundaries, connections, and differences. Leaving aside for the moment the question of what they *are*, both negative theology and deconstruction witness—and, in fact, catalyze—the failure of language to circumscribe an alterity that enables and exceeds linguistic determinations. If Derrida is hesitant to equate the two, it is not because he fails to recognize their similarities, but because he does not believe negative theology to be sufficiently negative; unlike *denégation*, apophaticism eventually negates negation, emerging with as strong an affirmation as positive theology. Moreover, he argues, negative theology has a locatable *arche* and *telos*, the *alpha* and the *omega*.¹² *Différance*, by contrast, has no investment in the ultimacy of the positive (or, for that matter, in ultimacy at all); it is without history or teleology, going nowhere in particular, but continually on the go. Because he holds that negative theology—whatever parameters one might assign to it—reserves a self-identical "presence" beyond presence and absence, a "being beyond Being", Derrida argues that negative theology is corrective of, but ultimately reducible to, positive theology. At the same time (and it is at least marginally apophatic thus to contradict oneself), Derrida writes in a letter that negative theology "does not let itself be easily assembled under the category, 'ontotheology-to-be-deconstructed' ".¹³ This is perhaps the main reason for the persistence of the deconstruction/apophaticism question. While it is instructive to enumerate the echoes of the latter in the former, there is a good deal more at stake in working through their relationship. If all theology is merely a mode of Western metaphysics as "monologic",¹⁴ if it is merely another name for phono-phal-logo-

ethnocentrism, then a radical critique of the latter's possibility also amounts to a critique of the possibility of the former. If, on the other hand, theology is *not* entirely confined to ontotheology—if, as Kevin Hart, Jean-Luc Marion and Jack Caputo have each argued in very different ways¹⁵, theology at its most “negative” might function *differentially*—then theology is not only possible after, but *aided* by, the “death of God put into writing”.¹⁶ What follows is not a delineation of apophatic/deconstructive similarities, nor an assertion that one strategy is ultimately reducible to the other, but an investigation into, and re-orientation of, the question of negative theology as anti-ontotheological. I take it as axiomatic that the possibility of a post-deconstructive theology rests on its ability to escape—at least occasionally—ontotheological determinations. And ultimately, I believe it is the ontotheological critique itself (from Pseudo-Dionysius and Eckhart through their postmodern descendants) that invests this theology with such *possibility*.

II. For Re-Orientation: A Dead-End and Proposed Detour

The term “ontotheology” was first used by Kant in reference to the metaphysical deduction of God's existence with no appeal to experience. It has come into common parlance, however, through the work of Martin Heidegger, for whom the entire history of Western metaphysics, from Plato to Nietzsche, can be called “ontotheology”, the mark of which is an inability to think the conditions of its own possibility. According to Heidegger, metaphysics-as-ontotheology is enabled by a withdrawal and forgetting of that which enables it: Being reveals itself in beings, but in so doing, conceals itself *as itself*. For this reason, metaphysics can only think Being with reference to beings; metaphysics “refers to Being and means beings as beings”.¹⁷ What this means for theology is that any reference to God as “Being” therefore remains anthropomorphic, comprehending God-as-Being through the perspective of (and thereby confining him to) the Being of beings. Inscribed in this manner within categories of human thought, the “God” of ontotheology becomes the highest object of that thought, the concept inserted at the beginning or end of philosophy as a logical necessity. One could thus locate the mainstays of ontotheology in the self-as-knowing and the “God” which the self knows: thinking subject and thought object. It is thus understandable that Heidegger located the consummation of ontotheology in Hegel, for whom subject and object, thought and Being, knower and known, are eventually identical in the Absolute Concept. The totalizing tide of *Aufhebung* completes the radical forgetting of the onto-ontological difference, claiming to reconcile it, but all the while failing to think it in the first place. To mediate any difference, one would have to know the quantities on both sides, and as Heidegger insists, metaphysics cannot possibly understand the “Being” it eventually reconciles with beings. In distinction to Hegel's forward-moving dialectic, which can

only further obscure the difference between Being and beings, Heidegger therefore proposes a retrogressive movement out of metaphysics into its ground—a “step back” toward Being-itself. Since Being *is* the difference ontotheology cannot think, overcoming metaphysics amounts to recalling the difference of metaphysics: difference-itself. “For Hegel, the matter of thinking is the idea as the absolute concept. For us, formulated in a preliminary fashion, the matter of thinking is the difference *as* difference.”¹⁸

Heidegger’s understanding of ontological difference as the blind-spot of metaphysics becomes the basis for Derrida’s reading of metaphysics as “the system functioning as the effacing of difference”.¹⁹ Translated into Derridean terms, Heidegger’s “step back” toward difference-as-difference becomes a re-cognition of the radical anteriority of *différance*: the spatio-temporal difference/deferral that identity both requires and represses. And although Derrida, unlike Heidegger, does not think it possible to *overcome* metaphysics, he does think it possible to *disrupt* metaphysics by provoking a return of the difference it represses from within the repressive structure itself. “Deconstruction” could be read as this provocation.

According to Derrida, even Heidegger ultimately essentializes Being, designating it the “transcendental signified” to which all signifiers eventually refer. Heideggerian Being remains outside the play of language, transcendent of the signification it engenders, and as such, it is “theological”. Theology, particularly for the early Derrida, is coextensive with the totalising metaphysical order: there is no theology other than ontotheology. Theology is the logocentric “sublimation of the trace”—an imperialistic discourse that clings to an impossible “presence” by denying the absence that constitutes it. Throughout the history of Western metaphysics, signification has been regulated through a theological obsession with univocity, through “the encyclopedic protection of theology and of logocentrism against the disruption of writing, against its aphoristic energy, and, as I shall specify later, against difference in general”.²⁰ Theology is the height of totalising pretense, and to that extent, the return of the repressed *gramme* will be profoundly anti-theological. Because he equates the theological and the onto-theological in this manner, Derrida can claim that deconstruction “blocks every relationship to theology”.²¹ Theology as denial-of-difference cannot withstand the violent return of difference-itself.

Borrowing the image from Artaud, Derrida describes the theological stage as enabled by an “Author-Creator who, absent and from afar . . . regulates the time or the meaning of representation” and his “interpretive slaves” on earth, carrying out his univocal will.²² The ontotheological God is a stable center, the conceptual ground and regulator of all meaning, the Archimedean point that stays the play of difference. The God of logocentrism is, in other words, the transcendental signified. This “God” is the highest object of thought for the ontotheological subject: a self-constituted, self-identical self whose stability precedes all textual determinations and relations. As Mark

Taylor has explained, "The *proper* theological self is the solitary self, whose self-consciousness assumes the form of an individual 'I' that defines itself by opposition to and transcendence of other isolated subjects. Such a self is primarily and essentially a *unique individual*. . . ." ²³ These concepts of God and self—an absolute object of thought and an absolute thinking subject—hold theology-as-ontotheology in place. The violent return of *écriture*, however, reveals the gaps, aporia, and idiosyncrasies upon which these concepts rely for their structural integrity. Deconstruction, inasmuch as it dispels the myth of the transcendental signified and articulates the radical inter-determination of subjectivity, destroys the ontotheological stage. And if theology is necessarily ontotheological, then post-Derrideans like Carl Raschke have every right to claim: "If God dies, so must theology. A 'death of God theology' is, and always was, an oxymoron, a tasteless jape, a *tour de farce*. The revelation of the farce is writing; and theology must write itself into the grave." Since "deconstruction within theology writes the epitaph for the death of God", a post-deconstructive theology could only be "a sophisticated perversion, a literary necrophilia". ²⁴ Yet deconstruction is only at odds with theology if theology is entirely reducible to a "metaphysics of presence"; if God is nothing but "God" and the self nothing more than the *cogito*. In what follows, I will argue that "God" and the self-identical self are *hardly* the "proper" poles of theology; that, in fact, any understanding of God and/or self (and/or, since the stability of one secures the stability of the other) as "proper" is profoundly *untheological*.

Now we can ask the question (again): does negative theology escape ontotheological determinations? Derrida says "no", because all negative theologies ultimately posit a hyper-essence beyond essence: the apophatic denial is merely transitory, always in service to the cataphatic affirmation of what is "proper" to God. For Derrida, negative theologies ultimately reserve space for a super-essential concept of the divine; even in Pseudo-Dionysius and Meister Eckhart, "God is the Good that transcends the Good and the Being that transcends Being". ²⁵ The apophatic voyage, even as it marks the presence of a certain absence, is guided by the "promise of a presence"; the prayers of Pseudo-Dionysius may demolish conceptual idols, but they have a pre-determined addressee: the Trinitarian God. Similarly, the deity in Eckhart

is still determined as the essence-of-the-threefold-God. And when Meister Eckhart seeks to go beyond these determinations, the movement which he sketches seems to remain enclosed in ontic transcendence. 'When I said that God was not a Being and was above Being, I did not thereby contest his Being, but on the contrary attributed to him a *more elevated Being*.' This negative theology is still a theology and, *in its literality at least*, it is concerned with liberating and acknowledging the ineffable transcendence of an infinite existent, 'Being above Being and

superessential negation'. . . . this is why, here (with *différance*), when the thought of Being goes beyond ontic determinations it is not negative theology, nor even a negative ontology.²⁶

The strongest voice against this position has been Jean-Luc Marion, who reads Pseudo-Dionysius as particularly resistant to the constraints of ontotheology. Contra Derrida, he maintains that Dionysius does *not* cling to a super-being beyond Being; that at its most negative, negative theology “does not aim to re-establish a ‘hyperessentiality’ [*superessentialité*], since it aims at neither predication, nor at Being; how, *a fortiori*, could there be a question of existence and essence in Dionysius. . . .”²⁷ The disagreement between Derrida and Marion on this matter hinges upon their differing readings of the word “*hyperousios*” in Dionysius: Derrida reads it as “hyperessentiality”, so that any God without Being is merely a Being beyond Being, whereas Marion renders *hyperousios* as “otherwise than being”, operating according to a Levinasian understanding of the word “without”. Of course, their broader intentions read through these definitions: while Marion wants to demonstrate that negative theology can survive the most rigorous post-structuralist critique, Derrida wants to ensure that *différance* (or writing, the supplement, the hymen, the pharmakon—whichever word he may employ to designate the trace-as-excluded) not be conflated with theology—not even with “the most negative of negative theologies”. And, to be sure, deconstruction is not identical with apophaticism; as Derrida rightly reminds us, *différance* has no agenda, no *arche*, no *telos*, and makes no ontological claims. It would be ridiculous to deny the persistence of such elements in thinkers like Dionysius and Eckhart; their agenda is theological—more specifically, Christian—their *arche* and *telos* is the divine, and they undeniably make ontological claims about it, as well as its relation to creation. In fact, convenient though it might be to ignore these moments, each of them refers to God as Being in at least a few places.²⁸ At the same time, it is not necessarily the case that the word “Being” may be read univocally throughout the *entire* history of Western thought.

Is God a Being beyond Being? Or is God otherwise than Being? The difference in Derrida’s and Marion’s definitions of *hyperousios* renders the debate a stalemate.²⁹ So the question of ontotheology’s scope with respect to negative theology needs to be redirected—not only because the giants on either side have reached a deadlock, but also because both sides seem to have lost sight of the reason for the argument. Rather than scanning mediaeval texts in search of a forbidden word, it might be helpful to re-evaluate the reason it became forbidden in the first place. The question is *not* whether or not Dionysius or Eckhart ever calls God “Being”, or even (gasp) *a* Being. They *do*. (They also, it should be noted, refer to the divine as nothing, everything, detachment, a charging bear, dew, a drunkard with a hangover, and a worm³⁰, but more on that later). The question, rather, is whether or not the

divine designation remains lodged within ontic categories. And *as a divine name*, Being is no more or less inappropriate than any other divine name.³¹ It becomes problematic when it masquerades as The Divine Name, leading the ontotheologian to believe he comprehends God when he utters the word "Being". Being becomes a "problem", in other words, when it is the object of an objectifying epistemology, holding in place the knowing subject and the known "God". The error of ontotheology is not using the word "Being" to refer to the deity, but deifying being as knowledge, and by extension, deifying the knowing subject itself.

Artaud: "the divine has been ruined by God. That is to say, by man. . . ."³² Because it absolutizes itself, the ontotheological subject cannot but kill off its god. When subjectivity is secured in and through its thinking, and the reality of "objects" is secured in and through the subject's ability to think them, then God becomes nothing more than a grounding—and, as it turns out, repressive—concept. And so subjectivity realizes itself as the author of what it took to be Objectivity, "kills" it through reappropriation, and effectively frees itself of "God". The necessary result of "God"'s disappearance, however, is the disappearance of the self that killed him. When the conceptual ground of self-interiority dies, the self-as-self-interior must die as well; moreover, the son's introjection of the father he has killed, more powerful spectrally than he was when he was "alive", completes the destruction of any myth of self-constitution. Yet *man can only drink up the sea if the sea was never the sea in the first place*. God can only die as "God"; the death of God is only possible when the subject has exalted himself to such an extent that God is merely the concept of "self-grounding ground" required by his thought. Any theology that attempts to function after the "death of God" (and the concomitant death of subjectivity) will thus need to depart radically from the self that knows itself as knowing. This is precisely where it seems to me that "negative theology" becomes important to contemporary thought. Centuries before Hegel's Absolute Concept (of course, Parmenides had identified thought and being long before Hegel), Meister Eckhart writes: "The masters say being and knowing are completely one. . . . Because God has an overflowing being, [however,] he transcends all knowledge. . . . Therefore Paul says: 'God dwells in a light to which there is no access.'"³³ Negative theology removes "knowledge" from its place of ontotheological privilege, so that presence is always inflected with absence, selfhood is only constituted through radical otherness, and knowing is only possible in and through unknowing. In other words (and this is what remains to be demonstrated), the apophatic self is irreducible to the knowing self, and the God it praises does not function as a *deus ex machina* flown in to stop a conceptual gap. In fact, negative theology destroys the very possibility of the coextensive *cogito* and *causa sui*, since the apophatic self only attains mystical union with the divine by abandoning all knowledge of itself and the divine. Yet while the apophatic voyage entails a thorough abandonment of "self" and "God" as

epistemologically constituted, it does not thereby resign itself to atheistic, ateleological surface-play. To the contrary, because it clings neither to “self” nor “God”, negative theology receives them back, *sans* ontotheological quotation marks, by *letting them be*.

III. *What is Negative Theology?*

How to describe the exorbitant goal of the millennial march—many times millennial—of travelers who have set out to see God? I am old and I still do not know. Yet authors talk a lot about it.³⁴

In the above sections, I have used the term “negative theology” somewhat irresponsibly, as if the term designated a static—or, at the very least, stable—set of theological practices, unified under a common negative rubric. To be sure, this is not the case, and when relying so heavily on a rather indeterminate “concept”, one needs to define one’s terms. Yet insofar as it belongs to the “encyclopedic” impulse of Western onto-theo-logic—the very totalising pretension that apophatic strategies aim to de-stabilize—*definition* in this case counteracts the work of that which it defines. The aporia that haunts *différance*, as well as the Derridean “gift”, Foucauldian “madness”, and Bataille’s “excess”, to name a few, thus resurfaces in any discussion of “negative theology”: to define these terms is to circumscribe them within the logic against which, *by definition*, they struggle. How could a consideration of negative theology possibly define it? *And yet*, how could it not? So it is with apologies to the delineated that I trace the parameters of “negative theology”, at least as it functions within this discussion.³⁵ And it is out of respect to the spirit thereof that I refrain from saying what it is.

1) The “negative theology” invoked here does *not* designate a way of “thinking” that stands in opposition to (or at all independently of) “experience”. It is common to distinguish negative theology, a set of discursive/philosophical/linguistic strategies, from the *via negativa*, a lived/experienced/practiced “mystical” ascent toward the divine. One tends to think of the apophatic utterance as “horizontal”, expressing the mystic’s “vertical” ascent. This is the distinction with which Kevin Hart, with whom I agree on most other matters, operates: “Whereas the aim of the *via negativa* is union with God, the critical object of negative theology is the concept of God.”³⁶ While Hart acknowledges the fluidity of the line he draws, I would maintain that the separation should not be made in the first place. It is true that negative theology aims to disrupt any “concept” that pretends to encompass the divine, but far from operating on a purely horizontal axis, it ascends in accordance with the celestial hierarchy. Moreover, the linguistic tactics of negative theology only operate as a means toward “mystical union”, which, in turn, is impossible without conceptual destabilization. The un-saying of negative theology, in other words, performs the

via negativa—the way “out” is the way “up”, and the way up is at once discursive and experienced.

2) Negative theology does not lead to “unknowing” as opposed to positive theology’s “knowing”. As Denys Turner has explained, Thomas Gallus and the anonymous author of *The Cloud of Unknowing* believe that halfway up the mystical mountain, the intellect *ceases*, and love completes the journey.³⁷ For the authors considered here, however, the apophatic abandonment of the intellect is at once its destruction *and* its consummation. For Dionysius and Eckhart, unknowing does not function in place of, but *within* intellect: “The most divine *knowledge* of God is that which *knows* through *unknowing*. ”³⁸ The ineffable union of human and divine, the “mystical experience” of unknowing, is thus thoroughly noetic; one could say that negative theology is not sheer *ignorantia*, but *docta ignorantia*.³⁹ And while one could ask, “how can there be *knowledge*, when there is no longer any distinction between the knower and the known?”⁴⁰ this question seems aporetic only because it remains confined to an Enlightenment construal of “knowledge”. If there can be an apophatic knowledge, it will be characterized precisely by its *non*-reliance upon the subject/object binary. Indeed, mysticism-as-noetic is only possible if apophatic unknowing is understood as the *telos*, rather than the simple cessation, of the intellect.

3) *Apophasis* does not oppose *cataphasis*. If *apophasis* were to offer a mere “no” to the cataphatic “yes”, then it would remain within the very logic it aims to subvert. Michael Sells has translated *apophasis* as “unsaying”,⁴¹ but it is crucial to emphasize that the apophatic unsaying of the said is also a saying of the unsaid, demonstrating itself to be thoroughly bound up with the cataphatic. This can only be understood, however, if “cataphaticism” is not conflated with “ontotheology”, as in the work of Toby Foshay.⁴² Cataphaticism does not function as straightforward, predicative discourse; to the contrary, it speaks hyperbolically, paradoxically, excessively, and utterly improperly. Because it also dismantles the grammatical propriety upon which “positive theology” relies, cataphatic over-saying is just as negative as apophatic under-saying. Most importantly, negative theology never rests with either positive or negative negativity, but is marked by *constant motion*. As Sells has argued, *apophasis* “yields then to a language of double propositions, each correcting the previous proposition, and meaning is only found in the fleeting tension between the two propositions. Because the language-conditioned mind tends to reify the last proposition as a self-standing utterance, *apophasis* can never achieve closure. There must always be another, new statement.”⁴³

4) To the extent that it operates according to a relentless neither/nor, negative theology is not unlike *denégation*. Foshay has called *denégation* a “kind of inverse apophatics”,⁴⁴ claiming that apophaticism eventually negates negation, whereas *denégation* alternates endlessly between the two.

If, however, apophaticism is understood always to be itself *and* cataphaticism, it becomes clear that negative theology aims neither to negate negation nor to affirm it, but to move constantly between the two poles in such a way that one becomes the other and their polarity collapses. To negate more simply—in mere correction of affirmation—would indeed remain within onto-theologic; simply to say that God is not *x*, *y*, or *z* is to presume one knows what God *is*. Thus, in an astoundingly proto-post-structuralist moment, Dionysius writes: “we should not conclude that the negations are simply the opposites of the affirmations, but rather that the cause of all is considerably prior to this, beyond privations, beyond every denial, beyond every assertion”.⁴⁵ Of course, Derrida refuses to call negative theology deconstructive because apophatic negation is ultimately performed out of a “desire to say and rejoin what is *proper* to God”,⁴⁶ aiming for a superpositivity beyond all the negated predicates. Yet while it is true that the apophatic ascent leads Dionysius, for example, from “improper” to “proper” names, he emphasizes that even names like “Word”, “Mind”, and “Being” remain conceptual, so that eventually, the proper names need to be denied as thoroughly as the improper names.⁴⁷ Similarly, Eckhart longs for “the quiet desert, into which distinction never gazed, not the Father, nor the Son, nor the Holy Spirit”,⁴⁸ because even the names Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are representations. Thus it is precisely the “desire to say what is *proper* to God”, more specifically, the *impossibility of its fulfillment*, that keeps negative theology constantly on the move. As distinct from both the motionless confidence of ontotheology and the aimlessness of *différance*, apophatic desire is neither resolved nor ateleological. The apophatic self, marked by an endless desire to represent that which she cannot represent, is thus marked by a certain absence—but also by an excess of presence, which constantly unspeaks her speech and speaks through her silence. Always interrupted and undone, “mystical speech” has no proper subject or object, and can only emerge through a full abandonment of the speaking self and spoken God.

IV. *Unselfing Self*

Whoever wishes to save his soul will lose it, whoever will lose his soul for me will save it⁴⁹

As we have seen, the self that knows itself as knowing, knows God as known; that is, as “God” rather than God (whatever God might be). Insofar as it consolidates, and eventually conflates, a self-determined subject and the object of its narcissistic “thought”, “knowledge” is the ontotheological *axis mundi*, installing the *cogito* at one end of the world and a conceptual divinity at the other. Apophatic “unknowing” could therefore be read as an attempt to elude this globalizing scheme, shattering both self and God as epistemologically constituted.

Long before Descartes will utter it from his solitary room, Pseudo-Dionysius locates the *cogito* as the primary obstacle to (un-)knowing God. The soul can only ascend to God by shedding its sensory and conceptual knowledge, which amounts to an abandonment of "selfhood" itself. In the *Mystical Theology*, Dionysius instructs Timothy,

leave behind you everything perceived and understood, everything perceptible and understandable, all that is not and all that is, and, with your understanding laid aside, to strive upward as much as you can toward union with him who is beyond all being and knowledge. By an undivided and absolute abandonment of yourself and everything, shedding all and freed from all, you will be uplifted to the ray of the divine shadow which is above everything that is.⁵⁰

The *Mystical Theology* shatters the myth of individualism, which even in the sixth century was bound up with a certain over-confidence in epistemological self-constitution, leading Dionysius to warn Timothy not to share the mystical secrets with those "who imagine that there is nothing beyond instances of individual being and who think that by their own intellectual resources they can have a direct knowledge of him who has made the shadows his hiding place".⁵¹ Such people weigh themselves down with themselves, too dazzled by the meager light of their own intellect to ascend to the divine darkness.

The way to be lifted to the God beyond all knowledge is to abandon that self which "knowledge" constitutes, and the way to abandon the self-knowing is to make knowledge *fail*. The self is unselfed when it cannot grasp itself conceptually, and since the structural integrity of the self is dependent upon the "God" it knows, apophatic discourse proceeds by mobilizing (and thereby destroying) all conceptions of the divine. This is the purpose of the hierarchically ordered "denials". In order to loosen any grasp it may have on "God", the mind first denies all perceptible predicates that seem "dissimilar" to God. So God is not a body, possesses no material qualities, cannot be perceived, does not change, etc.⁵² But then, lest the mind rest with conceptual predicates that seem "similar" to God, it must force itself through a series of more difficult denials, saying (which also amounts to unsaying) that God is not a soul, a mind, a number, time, eternity, divinity, spirit, sonship, or fatherhood, and "falls neither within the predicate of nonbeing or of being".⁵³ Through these denials, then, the mind ascends beyond its comfortable predicates toward that Source of which nothing can be properly predicated. And just when we believe we have *understood* this process, Dionysius adds that the divinity "is also beyond every denial".⁵⁴ And there ends the treatise. Negativity alone, it seems, is not enough.

Were Denys to conclude the *Mystical Theology* with simply negated predicates, he would leave the structure of dissimilarity and similarity (which, as we know from Chapter Five, God surpasses) perfectly intact; the similar-

ities, however denied, would remain more similar than the dissimilarities, and who can claim to measure a concept's similarity to the divine without conceptualizing the divine? So while the denials are one way of destabilizing the knowing self, in themselves they do not lead to union with God, for God is "beyond every denial". Negativity is not enough because, while nothing can be predicated of God, everything can be predicated of God. Thus one finds the mirror image of the *Mystical Theology* in the *Divine Names*, which affirms the names of God from highest to lowest, but ultimately denies them: "These, then, are the divine names. They are conceptual names, and I have explained them as well as I can. But of course I have fallen well short of what they actually mean."⁵⁵ These are God's proper names, but they still have not named God properly. These two treatises, then, move in opposite directions through the celestial hierarchy, unsaying their denials with affirmations, and their affirmations with denials, inverting the very structure of similarity and dissimilarity. Although it is *inverted*, however, this structure is not *subverted* until the section on dissimilarities in the *Celestial Hierarchy*.

There are countless metaphorical names of God, some of which are drawn from lofty images ("sun of righteousness", "clear and conceptual light"), some of which are drawn from less lofty images ("corner stone", "sweet-smelling ointment"), and some of which are drawn from decidedly *un-lofty* images ("charging bear", "worm").⁵⁶ According to the schema of the *Divine Names*, the mind should ground itself in the first, more suitably affirmed names, and then move down through the second to the third, which are less suitably affirmed. According to the structure of the *Mystical Theology*, the mind should begin with the third, more easily denied names and progress up through the second to the first, less easily denied names. According to the *Celestial Hierarchy*, however, it is actually *most* appropriate to affirm the *dissimilar* divine names. The problem with affirming similarities is that they mislead the mind into thinking that God *is* (or is even somewhat close to) what they say He is, just as denying dissimilarities allows the mind to believe it knows what He is not. The virtue of "incongruities", on the other hand, is that the mind is unlikely to be satisfied with them. "High-flown shapes could well mislead someone into thinking that the heavenly beings are golden or gleaming men, glamorous, wearing lustrous clothing", but incongruous images, in their "sheer crassness", act as "a goad so that even the materially inclined cannot accept that it could be permitted or true that the celestial and divine sights could be conveyed by such shameful things".⁵⁷ At this point, the intellect confronts an unremittingly aporetic scene and is unable to rest anywhere. Constantly reversing and subverting the logic of similarity and difference, the affirmations, denials, and dissimilarities wrest every image from the mind, provoking a radical failure of the understanding, which divests the self of itself. Only then can the soul be carried to God, which means that the intellect is fulfilled through its self-abandonment. Only by "renouncing all that the mind may conceive" does the self fall away, and

"here, being neither oneself nor someone else, one is supremely united to the completely unknown by an inactivity of all knowledge". Far from being extinguished, however, the intellect is raised out of itself, "and *knows beyond the mind by knowing nothing*".⁵⁸

For Eckhart as well, the "self" is constituted by its conceptual images, and both need to be given up to the restlessness of apophatic desire. If those who are poor in spirit shall be blessed, then "poverty" is the abandonment of the self-as-knowing: "A man is poor who knows nothing. . . . Whoever will be poor in spirit, he must be poor of all his own knowledge, so that he knows nothing, not God or created things or himself."⁵⁹ The soul, therefore, must "detach" itself from the objects of its knowledge, completely emptying out the intellect. Eckhart works through this theme most fully in his treatise *On Detachment*,⁶⁰ but it also surfaces in practically all of his German and Latin sermons. The word in German is *Abgeschiedenheit*, and as Michael Sells has pointed out, *Eigenschaft*, or "attachment", also means "possessiveness", as well as "self".⁶¹ The detached soul is therefore a soul that neither knows, wants, has, nor *is* anything, replacing its will-toward-possessiveness with *Gelassenheit*, or letting-be. It is this soul whom God fills with Himself. Yet this "poor" soul, receptive of the godly outpouring, does not contain God as a cask contains wine; rather, the soul is more like the wood that the divine fire consumes and makes into itself. Detached from all conceptual images, then, the self is no longer itself. The detached self does not become a space in which God may work; more dramatically, when a man becomes completely poor, "God is his own worker in himself".⁶²

The self's annihilation is its highest *telos*; the creature is consummated only by "going out" of itself: "God wants no more from you than that you should *in creaturely fashion* go out of yourself and let God be God in you."⁶³ The mystical self, in other words, is not in any way "proper". Rather, it is constituted in and through its very self-abandonment:

. . . the spiritual subject springs forth from the retreat or time lapse of the objects of the world. He is born from out of an exile. He is formed by wanting *nothing* and being but the respondent of the pure signifier 'God' or 'Yahweh,' whose acronym, since the burning bush, has been the act of burning all the signs: I have no other name than what makes you leave! The initial expression of the spiritual is nothing but *the decision to leave*.⁶⁴

To leave oneself is to know nothing, to know nothing is to be nothing, and "those who are equal to nothing, they alone are equal to God".⁶⁵ Yet just as unknowing does not oppose "knowing", the mystical subject's "nothingness" is not opposed to "somethingness", but beyond all determinations of thingness at all—a no-thing that is only nothing insofar as it is also everything. For the perfectly detached soul has "broken through" to the divine ground (*Grunt*) of pure Being-as-Nothingness, so that its ground and God's

ground are perfectly one. If the soul clings to images and forms of the divine, it clings to "God", thereby securing the "self" and moving increasingly farther from God. If, however, the soul leaves off its conceptual attachments, then "that supreme detachment . . . which is God himself"⁶⁶ consumes and consummates the mystical self—where the "self" has left, there God-as-Nothing becomes. In the process of abandoning the thinking self, then, the apophatic pilgrim must give up the "God" he confines to his thought: "therefore I pray to God to make me free of 'God.'"⁶⁷

V. *Ungodding God*

To see God is, in the end, to see nothing; it is to see nothing in particular; it is to participate. . . .⁶⁸

To be free of "God", the intellect must *give up* its conceptual grasp on God (*der Griff*—grip, grasp; *der Begriff*—concept, idea). Yet how does one go about making such a sacrifice? And to whom? Suppose I were to declare, "I renounce 'God' in the name of God." By whose authority would I claim access to the name in which I made the declaration? What would be the name of God in which I could give up 'God', and what would prevent this from naming another "God"? How could I possibly make a declaration, or even a predication, without relying on concepts that would invariably bind me again (*re-ligare*) to "God"? How do I give up "God"? How do I *say* that I give up "God"?

Perhaps the giving-up cannot be said; perhaps it can only be *done*. Or perhaps it can only be said through a saying that is first and foremost a doing, and perhaps this is why Eckhart *prays* to be freed of "God", hoping that the saying might enact what it says. Prayer, however, does not function like an everyday performative, immediately effecting that which it states through the conditions of the utterance itself. Unlike predicative performatives, it is not the subject's *speaking* that renders prayer performative, but the gift of the Spirit: inasmuch as it relies neither on a stable speaker nor on a fixed audience, prayer signals a *relinquishing* of the subject's power. In *praying* that God may free him of "God", Eckhart is giving up the "self" that holds "God" in place. In *praying that* God may free him of "God", Eckhart speaks an apophatic desire, endlessly driven by an endless giving-up. And in *praying that God* may free him of God, Eckhart gives up the giving up, asking that God sacrifice the "God" whom predicative language cannot kill.

Apophatic prayer is thus a means of smashing conceptual idols by ceding control of the hammer; a way to speak the other-as-unspeakable by letting the other speak.⁶⁹ By virtue of prayer, the persistent mobility of desire unhinges the stasis of "knowledge", preventing the re-formation of the epistemological "self" and "God". Dionysius: "If only we lacked sight and knowledge so as to see, so as to know, unseeing and unknowing, that which

lies beyond all vision and knowledge. For this would be really to see and to know: to praise the Transcendent One in a transcending way. . . .⁷⁰ If only we could give up the perceptual and conceptual objects of our thought, says Denys, we could *praise* God—not describe, explain, or comprehend God, but speak without objectifying, thank without thinking.⁷¹

“Yes”, says Derrida, “. . . Except.” Eckhart may pray to God to rid him of “God”, but this is driven by a desire to say what is proper to God who, although admittedly indeterminate, is still more properly God than “God”. The prayer that opens the *Mystical Theology* might cataphatically destroy the rational idols of metaphysics, but ultimately it has a pre-conceived addressee; in both Denys and Eckhart, the deity beyond “God” “is still determined as the essence-of-the-threefold-God”.⁷² Denys might not pray to the “God of the philosophers”, but even so, he *knows* whom to pray to. Yet both Denys and Eckhart take pains to say that “knowing” is precisely the problem. The One to whom prayer is addressed can only be called the apophatic *telos* because it *cannot* be known: “What is the last end? It is the hidden darkness of the eternal divinity, and it is unknown, and it was never known, and it will never be known.”⁷³ Even the Word conceals the God it reveals: “he is hidden even after this revelation [the Incarnation], or, if I may speak in a more divine fashion, is hidden even amid the revelation. For this mystery of Jesus remains hidden and can be drawn out by no word or mind. What is to be said of it remains unsayable; what is to be understood of it remains unknowable.”⁷⁴ Most importantly, it is the radical failure of knowledge that calls for (and enables) prayer in the first place; praise effects and signals the departure of the knowing self, as well as the abandonment of God as guarantor of an absolute, thinking subjectivity. If prayer uses names drawn from concepts, from creatures, from *beings*, it is not only because they are the only words we have, but because as prayer, words can say more than they can say. Through prayer, rocks, fleas, and worms speak of God: “‘Everything can be said of God, but nothing can be worthily said. No gap is greater than this: to seek a fitting name and not find it; to look for a way of speaking and to find all of them.’”⁷⁵

The cataphasis that constitutes apophasis does not point to a pre-determined essence beyond all denials, but to complete indetermination, complete over-determination, beyond denials, before them, between them, in them, and against them. Dionysius says that he writes the *Divine Names* by virtue of the gift of the Spirit, which has given the scripture writers the names that allow them to transcend the limits of “discourse or intellect”.⁷⁶ Yet these names only signify in their multiplicity—apophatic meaning only emerges in the spaces between sayings, between unsayings, and between saying and unsaying. If Dionysius can never rest with any one divine name, it is because he does *not* know whom to pray to, because he cannot know the unknown and cannot name the nameless he must name. This impossibility sustains apophatic desire, expressed as prayer. Thanks, then, to the

very nature of prayer, no name invoked therein can be “proper”: “God is not known to us in His nature, but is made known to us from His operations or effects. . . . This name God is an appellative name, and not a proper name.”⁷⁷ No divine name is a proper name, for each name only names as part of an endless exchange of countless names. “God” is merely one name, “Love” is merely one name, and as Eckhart has argued, even Father, Son, and Holy Spirit do not exhaustively name what they name.

Insofar as *none* of the divine names names what it names, the “Trinity!” to whom Dionysius addresses his *Mystical Theology* does not circumscribe the divine. Moreover, the “essence-of-the-threelfold-God”, which Derrida conflates with the transcendental signified, does *not* function essentially; that is, as a static concept installed beyond the play of difference. First of all, the Trinity is not installed *anywhere*; it has no discernible boundaries and no simple location, being neither an everything that excludes nothing nor a nothing that excludes everything. “The Trinity is not in any one location in such a manner as to be ‘away from’ one place or moving from ‘one spot to another.’ Even to speak of it as ‘present in everything’ is inaccurate since this does not convey the fact that it infinitely transcends everything and yet gathers everything within it.”⁷⁸ It is neither outside creation nor contained inside it, and it is “known” only insofar as it is FarNear (*Loingprès*)⁷⁹ to the annihilated self, whose location is just as indeterminate. Secondly, the Trinity does not signify stasis but a perfect motion of perpetual departure and return. For Eckhart, it is not just creation that is constituted through emanation but the Trinitarian God himself; while *ebullitio* is the creative overflowing of the divine into images that differ from God, *bullitio* describes the emanation between and among perfect images—an economy of constant giving and simultaneous return within the triune divinity. In his German sermons, Eckhart’s *bullitio* becomes *üzbruch* (break-out), and both images allow him to avoid reifying the Trinity: “The first break-out and the first melting-forth is where God liquefies and where he melts into his Son and where the son melts back into the Father.”⁸⁰ The Father melts forth into the Son, and the Son into the Father, through the power of the Spirit, itself the melting that sustains the immediacy of the divine exchange. Thirdly, far from functioning *beyond* difference, this exchange functions *through* difference, and *as* difference. Between and among the persons of the Trinity takes place a constant, reciprocal donation across irreducible distance—a distance that enables (and is maintained by) a radically anterior relationality. This intersubjectivity is *constitutive of*, rather than secondary to, the godhead: “The difference comes from the oneness, that is, the difference in the Trinity. The oneness is the difference and the difference is the oneness. The greater the difference, the greater the unity, because this is difference beyond difference.”⁸¹ Difference beyond difference is difference beyond the difference of identity and difference, a difference we cannot grasp since the identity against which one might measure the difference *is difference itself*.⁸²

If God has no proper name; if he can only be addressed as a non-object by a non-subject; if his Goodness is no more certain than his Wormhood; if his Being is pure Nothingness; if he presents himself only to a self no longer present to itself; if he is everywhere, nowhere, within, without, constantly departing, constantly returning, perfect identity, perfect difference, and all of these at once, and none of these at all, then how is God to function as a decent transcendental signified?

It is precisely because God refuses to be a static concept beyond the play of difference, that the only self that can know him is an unself that unknowns him. Eckhart: by completely renouncing all conceptual images of self and God, the intellect fails, and thereby breaks through to the divine ground which, undetermined as thisness or thatness, is *esse indistinctum*: "it is free of all names, it is bare of all forms, wholly empty and free, as God in himself is empty and free".⁸³ The divine ground is *esse* and *esse est deus*: to be, as neither this thing nor that thing but as thingless "is-ness", is God. And God, He who Is, is "the hidden ground' in the ground of the soul, where God's ground and the soul's ground are one ground".⁸⁴ In its ground, the soul is not a *hoc aliquid*, but *esse indistinctum*. In its ground, therefore, the soul is ineffable. Here apophatic theology meets apophatic anthropology: there is something utterly unknowable at the core of the soul, and this unknowability is the unknowability of God. In its ground, the created soul is just as ineffable as its creator, so that the very impossibility of knowing self or God constitutes the possibility of their relationship.

Eckhart's prayer to be free of God is therefore a prayer to be free of the knowing that represses unknowing, covering over the ineffable abyss uniting God and mankind, trapping God under "God" and the soul under "selfhood". Jack Caputo calls Eckhart's prayer a prayer against closure; one that "arises from an ongoing distrust of our ineradicable desire for presence, of our insidious tendency to arrest the play and build an altar to a produced effect . . . I pray God to rid me of 'Godhead,' that is, to keep me free of attachment to any signifier."⁸⁵ Giving up all knowledge of God conditions the possibility of relation to God; I can never know *what* I love when I love my God, but loving God I know *that* I love. Eckhart's prayer, then, is a prayer for prayer—a prayer to keep praying, which is the only way to ungod God.

VI. Relation

For Eckhart, it is the ultimate inscrutability of both creature and creator that unites them, in such a way that objectifying "knowledge", which aims to grasp the unknown, can only prevent their relation. The process of detachment from all conceptual images is an attempt not to recover inscrutability as such (for any recovering would always entail a re-covering), but to give into it completely, so that the mind, far beyond the determinations of selfhood and otherness, might, as Denys says, "plunge into the truly mysteri-

ous darkness of unknowing".⁸⁶ Eckhart reformulates this "plunge" as the break-through to the divine ground which, as it turns out, has been the ground of the soul all along. This "ground", of course, cannot be located, and it certainly cannot be grasped; it would perhaps be less misleading to call it a groundlessness (or even an un-ground). Eckhart frequently refers to this groundless ground as a spark (*Vüinkelîn*) within the soul that is uncreated, and therefore unknowable. Because its "isness" is uncreated *esse*—*esse indistinctum*—it cannot be grasped conceptually as one thing or another, and therefore cannot be grasped, much like God himself, who is "neither this nor that".⁸⁷ In fact, this spark, this ground that is both God's ground and my ground, must be God himself, for what could "ground" God except God? Thus can Eckhart say that "there is something in the soul that is so closely related to God that it is one [with him] and not just united".⁸⁸ Detachment, then, is the sacrifice of the self to the spark, of thisness and thatness to *esse*, of knowledge to unknowledge. By giving up all it knows of self and God, the soul breaks through to the non-place where self and God are one in unknowability. Beyond the failure of epistemology, then, emerges relationality.

Perhaps surprisingly, Eckhart describes this ground where God's ground is my ground, as *intellectus*. Since God *is* the ground, "God is one intellect and intellect is one God",⁸⁹ which means that insofar as I am intellect, I am God. What this also means, however, is that intellect is the site of my unknowability; insofar as I am intellect, I cannot be grasped by my own intellect. We might recall from Pseudo-Dionysius that, having been lifted out of itself, the apophatic mind "knows beyond the mind by knowing nothing".⁹⁰ If only we could get beyond knowledge of "God", says Denys, we could praise God as God. Unknowing, then, is not merely ignorance, but a subjectless, objectless doxology that emerges after the collapse of knowledge. Similarly, for Eckhart, it is intellect's failure that consummates the intellect-as-unknowable, and again, this unknowability grounds (groundlessly) human participation in the divine: "Rise up then to intellect; to be attached to it is to be united with God. To be united, to be one, is to be one with God."⁹¹

At both Cologne and Avignon, Eckhart was accused of heresy for identifying creatures with God. Indeed, Eckhart did hold this position, frequently uttering such boldnesses as: "If my life is God's being, then God's existence (*sîn*) must be my existence, and God's is-ness (*istichheit*) is my is-ness, neither less nor more."⁹² Oddly enough, however, he was also accused of heresy for *denigrating* creatures with respect to God, for believing that creatures are nothing in themselves. And Eckhart held this position as well, claiming that the "supreme attributes of God"—that is, his infinity, simplicity, purity, and perfection—"teach the weakness, or rather the nothingness, of creatures in relation to God".⁹³ On the one hand, he maintains that God's being and my being are the same being, and on the other hand, insists that "Being" can only be predicated of God if creatures have no being, and can only be used

of creatures if God is entirely beyond (in Marion's, rather than Derrida's sense of the word) Being. On the one hand, man is identical to God. On the other hand, man is irreducibly different from God. What is happening here?

Following Bernard McGinn's definitive reading of Eckhart, most scholars have emphasized the importance of the "*in quantum* principle" to his thought: identity is not mere identity, but identity *in quantum*. Eckhart does not say that man is God, but that, *insofar as he is intellect*, man is God. Man is composed of countless qualities, powers, and drives, most of which are *not* intellect, and insofar as man is any of these things, man is not God. Defending himself against his accusers at Cologne (who, incidentally, misunderstood him anyway), Eckhart used the example of the just man, who can be said to be Christ *insofar as he is just*. Christ is justice without qualification; he cannot act unjustly because his justice is inseparable from his existence. In humans, however, justice and existence are *separable*, which means we are not Christ exhaustively, but only insofar as we are just. And we are never simply just.⁹⁴ By extension, then, our is-ness is never simply God's is-ness, but only God's is-ness *in quantum*. Insofar as I am intellect, I am God. But I am never pure intellect, so I am never *really* identical with God.

. . . Or am I? While the *in quantum* principle is important to the immensely difficult task of interpreting Eckhart, it cannot fully account for his articulation of divine/human identity. Insofar as I am intellect, I am God. Certainly, insofar as I am "I", I am not pure intellect, so insofar as I am I, I am not God. But, insofar as I *am* intellect, *I am not 'I'*; insofar as I have broken through to the divine ground, there is no longer a residual I-ness apart from the oneness with God. The self only breaks through to the divine ground when the self is no longer itself. "So it is: and if God and your soul are to become one, your soul must lose her being and her life. As far as anything remained, they would indeed be *united*, but for them to become *one*, the one must lose its identity and the other must keep its identity: then they are one."⁹⁵ How, then, is the *in quantum* principle to apply when there is no self in excess of the "insofar"; when the self is God insofar as the self is not itself? How could Eckhart say that the annihilated self is truly *no longer itself* if, after the whole "mystical union" bit, there were a bit of self left over?

To what extent is the self identical with God? Denys Turner has suggested that Eckhart could have avoided heresy by invoking the distinction made by William of St. Thierry, who argued that "the man of God is found worthy to become not God, but *what God is*, that is to say man becomes through *grace* what God is by *nature*."⁹⁶ Although Turner maintains he does not, Eckhart does, in fact, make this distinction. In one sermon, he argues that the "man who makes himself wholly free of self for God's sake, who belongs to none but God and lives for none save God alone, is in truth *by grace* the same as God is *by nature*."⁹⁷ Grace for Eckhart comes to what I have been referring to as the "unselfed self", the one who, giving up the possessive will to conceptual knowledge, gives up the ontotheological God and self. What this

means for Eckhart is that *detachment* is the virtue “with which [man] can by grace become that which God is by nature, and with which man can come most of all to resemble that image which he was in God, and between which and God there was no distinction before ever God made created things”.⁹⁸ If, however, *God* is detachment-itself, then it is only through grace that the soul can become detached in the first place. Grace, therefore, grants the detachment that summons grace. Like the *in quantum* principle, the grace/nature distinction itself cannot account for all the complexities of Eckhart’s “identity” between God and mankind. It does, however, point to a certain tremor *within* that identity. If we can become through grace what God is by nature, and this difference still constitutes *identity*, then perhaps identity in Eckhart needs to be re-thought. Perhaps an identification of God and creature does not amount to their confusion, or even their conflation. Perhaps, more radically, an identification of God and creature actually attests to their *difference*. Perhaps Eckhart does not ultimately need the *in quantum* qualification as a means of securing ontological difference, simply because his account of *identity* maintains difference as irreducible.

Perhaps we could step back for a moment. The problem at hand could be stated thus: we see in both Denys and Eckhart that the failure of “knowledge”, provoked by the restlessness of *apophasis*, conditions knowledge’s consummation as *relation*. Eckhart spends more time discussing this relation than does Denys, and describes it as the perfect identity—the oneness, rather than just unity—of the annihilated self with God. Does this mean that the self disappears into the divine? If so, then how can we speak of mystical unknowing as relational? If the apophatic subject does not survive its encounter with God—if it is merely swallowed into the totalising divine *esse*, then how is Eckhart’s God any different from the Absolute Spirit that perfectly unites an absolutized subject with every object of its thought?⁹⁹ If, as I have argued, the self in identity with God does not even remain partially itself, so that the *in quantum* principle ultimately has nothing to which it might apply, then it looks as if Eckhart is a perfect forerunner of the impulse within German Idealism toward reconciliation, an impulse which eventually *prevents* relation by denying the difference relation requires. Which is to say nothing of the idolatrous nature of such a position. And yet, Eckhart was condemned for maintaining that man and God were identical, *and* for asserting their absolute difference. I would like to suggest, therefore, that Eckhart, far from requiring a means of *qualifying* identity, was trying to formulate a more nuanced account of identity itself. Historically speaking, an understanding of identity as preserving difference rather than assimilating it, does not *fully* emerge until Schelling’s *Identitätsphilosophie*—perhaps not even until Heidegger’s reading and revision of it.¹⁰⁰ But I maintain that a certain difference-in-identity is already in operation in Eckhart, allowing him to say that man is *at once* identical with and different from God; that “nothing is as dissimilar as the Creator and any creature. In the second place, nothing is as

similar as the Creator and any creature. And in the third place, nothing is as equally dissimilar and similar to anything else as God and the creature are dissimilar and similar in the same degree."¹⁰¹

When Heidegger decides to step back out of metaphysics in order to think difference-as-difference, he begins by re-thinking identity. As far as Heidegger is concerned, difference can only be maintained as originary (and therefore enduring) if identity is understood *not* as the reconciliation of all difference, but the "*belonging-together* [*zusammengehören*] of what is different in one".¹⁰² In *Identity and Difference*, Heidegger explains that while an emphasis upon the *zusammen*, or "together", yields an ultimate mediation of difference, emphasizing the *gehören*, or "belonging", in identity preserves the difference in identity itself. This understanding of identity is an elaboration on Schelling, who articulated identity as "the link of a being as One with itself as a multiplicity",¹⁰³ or the connection between two principles: existence and ground. For Schelling, therefore, subject is related to predicate as *ground* to *consequens*; $A = B$ does not mean that A and B are equivalent, but that B receives its being from A. Schelling shifts the verb "to be" from intransitivity to transitivity; A is-es B. A gives B its is-ness, and B is is-ed by virtue of A. Understood this way, the pantheistic utterance "God is everything" becomes perfectly orthodox: God, far from being equivalent to "everything", gives everything its to-be; God is-es everything. Ultimately, this logic of identity allows Schelling to posit the highest freedom as living in relation to God as *consequens* to the divine ground; in other words, living in identity with God. But this identity is only possible because of the irreducible difference between the human and divine. That which is created, Schelling emphasizes, can never become the principle of its own origination, which means that humans differ from God not merely by degree but *toto genere*.¹⁰⁴ And this difference conditions identity, which in turn preserves difference. Following Schelling, then, Heidegger understands identity as the *copula*: the relation between ground and existence, or the band between *theos* and *pan*, established prior to all metaphysical determinations (which always rely upon an opposition of difference and identity) in the atemporal "event", or *Ereignis*. If Being-itself cannot be thought metaphysically, perhaps it is because Being cannot be thought as itself—because Being, the belonging-together of a being with the ground of its being, *is always relational*.

When identity *is* in and through difference, writes Heidegger, it "is truly not a dead relation of indifferent and sterile identicalness, but 'unity' is directly productive, creative, and progressing toward otherness".¹⁰⁵ Over six hundred years earlier, Eckhart had written that "I am who am", the expression of God's perfect identity with himself, "indicates a reflexive turning back of his existence into itself and upon itself and its dwelling and remaining fixed in itself. It further indicates a 'boiling' or giving birth to itself—glowing in itself, and melting and boiling in and into itself."¹⁰⁶ God's to-be, the most perfect expression of self-sameness, is also the principle of differ-

entiation itself, and this constant interplay of difference and identity finds further expression in the intersubjective reciprocity of the Trinity. As we have seen, Eckhart describes the exchange between and among the persons of the Trinity as the perfect motion of *bullitio*, the constant “boiling”, or “giving birth to itself” invoked above. And just as the primary emanation of *bullitio* gives rise to emanation as *ebullitio*, the anteriority of relation in the Trinity conditions relation across ontological difference.

The soul in identity with God is not merely extinguished but consummated, annihilated as itself not to be absorbed into indifference, but to be restored as relational. Eckhart frequently refers to the soul as the “virgin wife”: at once utterly pure and constantly creative. The groundless ground that unites man and God in unknowing, far from being a consumptive void of static identity, is the site of continual and productive exchange between humanity and God. For once the self has been divested of itself, breaking through to its divine ground in *intellectus*, Eckhart says that the soul becomes the non-place of the Incarnation itself. “As truly as the Father in his simple nature gives his son birth naturally, so truly does he give him birth in the most inward part of the spirit, and that is the inner world. Here God’s ground is my ground, and my ground is God’s ground.”¹⁰⁷ The very *being* of the annihilated soul is its constant reception of the divine *esse*, and being-as-receiving the gift of the Father, the soul is constituted as the Son. And since true reception is always also a giving-back,¹⁰⁸ the soul simultaneously gives birth to the Son in the divine ground: “Out of the purity he everlastingly bore me, his only-born Son, into that same image of his eternal Fatherhood, that I may be Father and give birth to him of whom I am born.”¹⁰⁹

The Father gives birth to the Son in the “most inward part of the spirit”. “Spirit” here is the modern translation of the Middle-High German *Gemüete*: the Father gives birth to the Son in the most inward part—the spark, *Vunkeln*, also *intellectus*—of the *Gemüete*. As Reiner Schürmann has noted, the word *Gemüete* was used in the late Middle Ages to translate *mens* in Aquinas, and for Thomas, *mens* is never just that faculty which thinks, but also that which loves, understands, and wills. *Gemüete*, therefore, “designates not another faculty along with the intellect and the will, but their common root insofar as it actuates man’s ‘return’ upon the image of God in himself”.¹¹⁰ By virtue of detachment, the Father gives birth to the Son, through the Spirit, in the spirit—the *Gemüete*—where pure intellect is also pure will, and pure love. Knowledge’s consummation through unknowing as relation, therefore, is the intellect’s consummation as perfectly one with love and will, as they are perfectly one in the persons of the Trinity.

The self’s complete detachment from itself and God thus engages the soul in ceaseless exchange with God—more precisely, the soul emerges *through* its ceaseless exchange with God. The *telos* of the annihilated soul is its full participation in the interrelation of the Trinity. It is important to remember, however, that while Eckhart is *identifying* the annihilated soul with the

persons of the Trinity, he is not *equating* them. As we have seen, Eckhart maintains that nothing could be more indistinct than the relation between Creator and creature, since “nothing is so much one and indistinct as a thing that is composed and that from which, through which, and in which it is composed”.¹¹¹ At the same time, nothing could be more distinct than the relation between distinction and indistinction, which respectively describes creaturely and divine *esse*. The soul’s distinction from God *is* its indistinction from God, particularly when the copula is read transitively. Because God himself is that perfect identity that is also perfect difference, man’s relation to God is one of difference-in-identity as well, which means that ontological difference is not eclipsed but *preserved* through man’s identity with the Trinity: “Where the Father gives birth to his Son in me, there I am the same Son and not a different one. We are, of course, different with respect to our humanity, but there I am the same son and not a different one.”¹¹² At the depths (or height) of the unknowable, the Father gives birth to the Son in the soul, effecting the analogical identity of the soul with the creative Father. And that power which renders the soul both Son and not-Son, both Father and not-Father—the power by which perfect identity is perfect difference—is the Spirit.

Because humanity’s identity with God *is* its irreducible difference from God (“nothing is as dissimilar as the Creator and any creature. In the second place, nothing is as similar as the Creator and any creature . . .”), humanity can never be swallowed into, conflated with, or cut off from its divine ground. When, having broken through to the divine ground that is my ground, I am no longer the “I” I had *thought* myself to be, then my being is as neither this nor that. This is not because my being has ceased to be, but because it has come into being—*because it is-as-participating in the trinitarian esse*, or the irreducible relationality of being. My being in identity with God, far from signaling stasis, idolatry, or the denial of difference, means that I am not *I* because I *am* as related to God—my being emerges through a constant exchange across the difference of identity. “My body and my soul are more in God than they are in themselves.”¹¹³ Having thoroughly renounced myself and my God, I receive myself and God back *as relational*; that is, as more than they ever were before the giving-up.

VII. *Repetition*

Of that self-surpassing spirit, seduced by an impregnable origin or end called God, it seems that what for the most part still remains, in contemporary culture, is the movement of perpetual departure; as if, unable to ground itself in a belief in God any longer, the experience only kept the form and not the content of traditional mystics. . . . the traveler no longer has foundation nor goal. Given over to a nameless desire, he is the drunken boat. Henceforth this desire can no longer speak to someone. It

seems to have become infans, voiceless, more solitary and lost than before, or less protected and more radical, ever seeking a body or poetic locus. It goes on walking, then, tracing itself out in silence, in writing.¹¹⁴

On Staten Island, the “forgotten borough” of New York City, there are two acceptable teenage greetings. Passing a friend in the high-school corridor, five minutes after the late bell and sauntering aimlessly in impossibly baggy jeans, one could call out to her, “‘s’up,” expecting to hear, “nuthin’”. Standard fare. More recently, however, the call has become, “where y’ goin’”? and the response, “nowhere”. Even if she *is* going somewhere—lunch, basketball practice, home, class—she answers, “nowhere”. To say anything else would be tantamount to replying to a casual “how are you”, politely called out in passing, with “well, to tell you the truth, not so great—I’ve been having toothaches . . .”. It’s just not done in polite company. “‘S’up . . . nuthin’. . . . Where y’ goin’ . . . nowhere.” Call and response. The liturgy of a forgotten borough. The “how you doin’ . . . ah’ight” sequence is really more Brooklyn than it is Staten Island, and the kids who exchange a “How are you?. . . very well, thank you” usually leave school with fewer limbs than they had arrived with. “Nowhere” and “nuthin” (more accurately, pronounced “nuh-in”) have become the automatic responses—the unthinking and immediate assurance that all is well. Or at least, that nothing’s changed.

For what could possibly change when all is constant change? Against what would we measure it? What could we possibly say is up? And where, in good faith, could we say we are going? Indeed, the Staten Island high school student might be the best anti-ontotheologian around.

The ontotheological impulse plays itself out as the desire to end desire with the certainty of the Concept. Ontotheology progresses as the thinking subject’s attempt to circumscribe and guard itself: to trace its own boundaries, to gather itself together, and to tie itself securely with a stable, knowable super-object. Since, however, any project of putting an end to desire is always doomed to strengthen it, the subject becomes restless, pushing against the super-object and finally recognizing it as the product of his own intellectual design. The subject himself realizes that he had thought the super-object into being as a means of holding himself together. When he realizes this, he proclaims that “it is man who is the original model of his idol”,¹¹⁵ and in the epistemontotheological world he has created for himself, he is quite right. Wishing to be no longer constrained, no longer bound to finitude, the subject destroys the object that held his thought in place, setting himself free as thought itself. And the madman cries in the marketplace, “God himself is dead, and we have killed him.”¹¹⁶ We have killed him because we created him in the first place, because there was never any God to ground us *as ourselves*—only “God”, which was nothing but the product of our thought. And so we are free. . . . Except. Except *we* were the ones oppressing us; killing God, we’ve killed ourselves. The conceptual “God”

was the thing securing the “self”, and so without a self-identical, static God, there can be no self-identical, static self. This is the error of the atheist humanist, attempting to liberate humanity by ridding it of God. Taking leave of God,¹¹⁷ the atheist humanist does not realize that he must also take leave of himself—that his gesture of self-exaltation implies his self-demolition. For indeed, he who denies God in order to make himself stronger and greater “does not see that, in reality, the One whom he thus blasphemes and exorcises constitutes his whole strength and whole greatness”.¹¹⁸ Now that God is gone, who will hold the subject together?

In distinction to the atheist humanist, the postmodern subject knows all too well that he cannot be *him*—that self-identity is impossible after the death of God—and “embraces the disappearance of the self”,¹¹⁹ giving in to ordinary indeterminacy and inter-determination. The postmodern subject, having given up all possibility of God, self, author, and book, actually looks a good deal like the mystic. Having exposed the myth of individuality, the impossibility of univocity, the absence at the origin, the treachery of meta-narrativity, and the ateleology of existence, he is the knight of infinite resignation, giving up everything with no hope of its ever returning. How, though, can one *be* the knight of infinite resignation? Having renounced his god and himself, *who* is the knight who remains? What could he cling to that would make him the knight who clings to nothing? Infinite resignation, it seems, can only exist in passing—as a moment on the way to faith, or on the way back down into something else. And that “something else”, hardly a proper designation, would probably be a most fitting appellation for the postmodern.¹²⁰

With nothing to hold on to, the postmodern something else renounces all attachment to stability and sets off wandering, tracing himself in “writing”—in the spaces between words, the pauses and ellipses of speech, the repressions, denials and nots that always speak absence, and no, and not yet. The present never presents itself, the self never is, and the savior never comes.¹²¹ Yet here a problem arises: when presence is marked off as that thing—whatever it is—which never arrives, it is just as regulative, just as revered as it was in the ontotheological order.¹²² Whether it’s unequivocally here or unequivocally never here, presence remains presence: disallowing presence completely only re-reifies it as such. Presence, in other words, returns to disrupt the now-repressive post-structuralist counter-order. Likewise, when writing becomes the only mark of a radically ex-centric subjectivity, it becomes a means of *re-consolidating* selfhood. Speaking as the Descartes of the *Regulae*, Jean-Luc Nancy writes, “it is not what I am writing that I understand while I am writing; but I understand or rather I gather *that I am writing*. I gather myself writing. *Cogito, sum*, is the way it will be written later; here, I write *scribo, intelligo*.”¹²³ And this will-toward-selfhood does not disappear for all our recognition of its hopelessness. We cannot have a Cartesian faith in writing, for *écriture* disrupts every concept and breaks up all ground, but

still, we write to understand, still we gather ourselves writing. In the absence of transcendence, inscription becomes our only guard against death, but it is always a duplicitous one: a hope for immortality in signs we *know* we cannot trust. And yet the treachery of writing is the only possibility of a post-subjective *causa sui* project: as I write, I hope against hope that my dispersal might be my immortality, that my dis-membering in writing might be a remembering in writing. I gather myself in the writing that leaves me undone.

In this manner, the postmodern something else is caught in a double-bind, all the more excruciating for his persistent consciousness of his situation. Like the father he has killed, the will-toward-selfhood haunts him more persistently the more he tries to excise it. He can neither *be* as such nor transcend himself, so that even the happiest of surface-skippers will attempt to gather himself together with an occasional, "I have been read less and less well over almost twenty years, like my religion about which nobody understands anything."¹²⁴ or, in fact, a "No, what I write is not negative theology." Plagued, however, by a hyper-critical sensibility, he knows he cannot ultimately hold the self he writes, and thus he must always qualify, cross-out, un-say and over-speak. He may not want to be understood in a certain fashion, but "who could prohibit it? In the name of what?"¹²⁵ And so everywhere the subject turns, he is surrounded by aporia. He is unable to secure himself, yet equally unable to give himself up, for what could he possibly give himself up *to*? Not, it seems, writing—at least not completely—for writing can only bind him in the maddening circularity of a self-obsession that sees the incoherence of the self over which it obsesses. And he certainly could not give himself up to faith, for faith is impossible now. What's up . . . nothing . . . where you going . . . nowhere. . .

And yet we have this persistent fascination with the negative theologian. The one who looks a bit like us seven or fifteen hundred years ago, except that he can say what we cannot. If one were to give up all attachments to concepts, to truth, to knowledge, and to God, says the mystic, if a person were to give himself up completely in this manner, "anyone who had so forsaken himself, he would truly be given back to himself".¹²⁶ But we are not mystics—we are more like the man who laments, "repetition is too transcendent for me. I can circumnavigate myself, but I cannot rise above myself."¹²⁷ Abraham had faith, the poor man who wanted roast lamb's head with vegetables had faith,¹²⁸ but how could *we*? How could we have faith *now*? We've lived without God, we've waited in the world, we've looked to the proletariat, drowned in the text, danced on fault-lines and abandoned all hope of truth—what more can we renounce? How could we give up ourselves, how could we give up *God*, any more than we've already done? Maybe the problem is that the giving up has actually re-solidified us "some-things-else" into givers-up—I'm not, therefore I am—into subjects of a late, forgotten kingdom going nowhere, where nothing's up and so *nothing can really be given up*, for who would receive it? To whom could we give up the

giving up? Maybe the postmodern subject is the mystic who cannot believe in repetition.

Faith is impossible now. And yet, when has it ever been otherwise? "Everyone shall be remembered", promises the man who speaks from silence, "but everyone became great in proportion to his *expectancy*. One became great by expecting the possible, another by expecting the eternal; but he who expected the impossible became the greatest of all."¹²⁹ What if ours could be called an era of complete detachment? What if, through modernity, post-modernity, and post-post-modernity, we have undergone the most thorough divestment of conceptuality, so thorough that we cannot even remember we've undergone it in the name of God? What if, unable to attach itself to any name, the erring knight could be read as the annihilated self? What if, having finally given up all claims to absolute knowledge, we might now be opened out to relationality? Could it not be that now, at the height of aimlessness, in the depths of poverty, the unselfed self might receive itself back as much more than itself?

For Heidegger, giving up the thinghood of things amounts to seeing their identity (in Schelling's sense of the word) with God. Difference-in-identity restores "thinghood" since, far from being merely itself, "the thinghood of things consists in revealing the nature of God". Things *are* by virtue of their participation in God, so that when Being is understood relationally, "to be a thing means to present God's Being, which is an eternal becoming, itself as a becoming. Things refer through themselves . . . and this referring-through-themselves is not an act which they perform on top of being things, but being a thing is this referring-through-itself, this transparency."¹³⁰ Could it be that our wandering has not been quite as ateleological as we might have thought? Could the complete destruction of being-as-substance give way to being-as-relational, so that meaning might re-emerge in the constancy of exchange? And could that be the repetition we've stopped waiting for? The gift we don't believe in? "We shall be united with him and, our understanding carried away, blessedly happy, we shall be struck by his blazing light. . . . We shall be 'equal to angels and sons of God, being sons of the resurrection.'"¹³¹ Is it possible that now, no-thing being possible, things may finally be possible? Is it possible that the utter impossibility of self, of God, of theology, has become their very possibility? Who knows. Who unknowns. Who knows.

NOTES

- 1 Meister Eckhart, "Sermon 52" in Edmund Colledge and Bernard McGinn (eds), *The Essential Sermons, Commentaries, Treatise, and Defense* (New York, NY: Paulist Press, 1981), pp. 200–201. Hereafter *SCTD*.
- 2 Jacques Derrida, "How to Avoid Speaking: Denials" in Harold Coward and Toby Foshay (eds), *Derrida and Negative Theology* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1992), p. 77.
- 3 *Ibid.*, p. 74.

- 4 *Ibid.*, p. 78.
- 5 Jacques Derrida, "Différance" in Mark C. Taylor (ed), *Deconstruction in Context: Literature and Philosophy* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1986), p. 399.
- 6 Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Translator's Preface" in Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Spivak (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), p. lxxviii.
- 7 Derrida, "Différance", p. 400.
- 8 Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, p. 47.
- 9 I have stolen this sequence of negations from Mark C. Taylor; see Taylor, "nO, nOt, nO" in Coward and Foshay (eds), *Derrida and Negative Theology*, pp. 167–198.
- 10 Derrida, "The Original Discussion of *Différance*" in David Wood and Robert Bernasconi (eds), *Derrida and Différance* (Warwick: Parousia Press, 1985), p. 132.
- 11 *Ibid.*, 130.
- 12 This is undeniable; c.f. Eckhart: "Yet first grace consists in a flowing out (*effluxus*) or going out from God; second grace in a flowing back (*refluxus*) or return into God himself" (as cited in McGinn, "Introduction: Theological Summary" in Colledge and McGinn (eds.), *SCTD*, p. 30).
- 13 Jacques Derrida, "Letter to John P. Leavey", *Semeia* Vol. 23 (1982), p. 61.
- 14 Again, this is Mark Taylor's term; see Taylor, *Deconstructing Theology* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1982) and *Erring: A Postmodern A/theology* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1984).
- 15 C.f. Kevin Hart, *The Trespass of the Sign* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), Jean-Luc Marion, *God without Being*, trans. Thomas A. Carlson (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1991), and John D. Caputo, "Mysticism and Transgression: Derrida and Meister Eckhart" in Hugh Silverman (ed), *Derrida and Deconstruction* (London: Routledge, 1989).
- 16 This is Carl Raschke's term; see Raschke, "The Deconstruction of God" in Thomas J. J. Altizer et al. (eds.), *Deconstruction and Theology* (New York, NY: Crossroad Publishing Company, 1982), p. 1–33.
- 17 Martin Heidegger, "The Way Back into the Ground of Metaphysics" in Walter Kaufmann (ed.), *Existentialism: From Dostoevsky to Sartre* (New York, NY: Meridian Books, 1969), p. 211.
- 18 Martin Heidegger, *Identity and Difference*, trans. Joan Stambaugh (London: Harper and Row, 1969), p. 47.
- 19 Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, p. 23.
- 20 *Ibid.*, 18.
- 21 Jacques Derrida, *Positions*, trans. Alan Bass (London: Athlone, 1981), p. 40.
- 22 Jacques Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), p. 235.
- 23 Taylor, *Erring*, p. 130.
- 24 Carl Raschke, "The Deconstruction of God", pp. 27, 30.
- 25 Derrida, "How to Avoid Speaking", p. 113.
- 26 Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, p. 146.
- 27 Marion as cited in Arthur Bradley, "God sans Being: Derrida, Marion and 'A Paradoxical Writing of the Word Without'", *Literature and Theology* Vol. 14, No. 3 (September, 2000), p. 302.
- 28 See, for example, Pseudo-Dionysius: "[God] is the Being pervading all beings and remains unaffected thereby. It is the supra-being beyond every being" (Pseudo-Dionysius, *The Divine Names*, in Colm Lubheid [trans.], *The Complete Works* [New York, NY: Paulist Press, 1987], p. 66). See also Meister Eckhart, for whom God is "a being transcending being" (Eckhart, "Sermon 83" in Colledge and McGinn (eds), *SCTD*, p. 207).
- 29 For a full demonstration of this stalemate, see Bradley, "God Sans Being".
- 30 C.f. Eckhart, "Sermon 83", p. 207; *On Detachment*, in Colledge and McGinn (eds), *SCTD*, pp. 285–294; and Pseudo-Dionysius, *The Celestial Hierarchy*, in Lubheid (ed), *The Complete Works*, p. 152, *The Divine Names*, p. 56, and *The Celestial Hierarchy*, pp. 139, 152.
- 31 This is not, of course, to say that Being is convertible with other divine names. To be sure, Dionysius includes Being among the names that are "similar" to God since their origin is divine, as distinct from the "dissimilar" names derived from creatures. At the same time, however, he emphasizes that even the similar names need to be denied; moreover, that the dissimilar names, insofar as they prevent the initiate from believing he can

- describe God, can be more helpful to his ascent than the similar names. I shall return to this later.
- 32 Artaud as cited in Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, p. 244.
 - 33 Eckhart, "Sermon 3" in Bernard McGinn (ed), *Teacher and Preacher* (New York, NY: Paulist Press, 1986), p. 246.
 - 34 Michel de Certeau, "White Ecstasy" in Graham Ward (ed), *The Postmodern God* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1998), p. 155.
 - 35 It is important to note that while the negative moments of other cultural and religious traditions—Judaism, Islam, and Buddhism in particular—offer equally important challenges to onto-theo-logic, this essay focuses on "Western", Christian apophatic thought, particularly as it reads through the work of Pseudo-Dionysius and Meister Eckhart.
 - 36 Hart, *The Trespass of the Sign*, p. 176.
 - 37 See Denys Turner, *The Darkness of God: Negativity in Christian Mysticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), pp. 46–47.
 - 38 Dionysius as cited in Jean-Luc Marion, *The Idol and Distance: Five Studies*, trans. Thomas Carlson (New York, NY: Fordham University Press, 2001), p. 150.
 - 39 For this Cusan echo, I am indebted to Professor Denys Turner.
 - 40 Don Cupitt, *Mysticism and Modernity* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1998), p. 25.
 - 41 Michael Sells, *Mystical Languages of Unsayings* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1994).
 - 42 See, for example, Toby Foshay, "Introduction: Denegation and Resentment" in Coward and Foshay (eds), *Derrida and Negative Theology*, pp. 1–24.
 - 43 Michael Sells, "The Pseudo-Woman and the Meister: 'Unsayings' and Essentialism" in Bernard McGinn (ed), *Meister Eckhart and the Beguine Mystics* (New York, NY: Continuum, 1994), p. 115.
 - 44 Foshay, "Introduction: Denegation and Resentment", p. 7.
 - 45 Pseudo-Dionysius, *Mystical Theology*, p. 136.
 - 46 Derrida, "Post-Scriptum: Aporias, Ways, and Voices" in Coward and Foshay (eds.), *Derrida and Negative Theology*, p. 310.
 - 47 Word, Mind, and Being "are actually no less defective than [images drawn from the world], for the Deity is far beyond every manifestation of being and of life; no reference to light can ever characterize it; every reason or intelligence falls short of similarity to it" (Pseudo-Dionysius, *Celestial Hierarchy*, p. 149).
 - 48 Eckhart, "Sermon 48" in Colledge and McGinn (eds.), *SCTD*, p. 198.
 - 49 Matthew 16:25 (King James Version).
 - 50 Pseudo-Dionysius, *Mystical Theology*, p. 135.
 - 51 *Ibid.*, p. 136.
 - 52 See *Ibid.*, pp. 140–141.
 - 53 *Ibid.*, p. 141.
 - 54 *Ibid.*
 - 55 Pseudo-Dionysius, *The Divine Names*, p. 130.
 - 56 Pseudo-Dionysius, *Celestial Hierarchy*, p. 152.
 - 57 *Ibid.*, 150.
 - 58 Pseudo-Dionysius, *Mystical Theology*, p. 137; emphasis mine.
 - 59 Eckhart, Sermon 52, pp. 200–201.
 - 60 Eckhart, *On Detachment*, in Colledge and McGinn (eds), *SCTD*, pp. 285–294.
 - 61 Sells, "The Pseudo-Woman and the Meister", p. 137.
 - 62 Eckhart, "Sermon 52", p. 202.
 - 63 Eckhart, "Sermon 5" in Colledge and McGinn (eds), *SCTD*, p. 184; emphasis mine.
 - 64 De Certeau, *The Mystic Fable, Volume One: The Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries*, trans. Michael B. Smith (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1992), p. 177.
 - 65 Eckhart, "Sermon 6" in Colledge and McGinn (eds.), *SCTD*, p. 187.
 - 66 Eckhart, *On Detachment*, p. 294.
 - 67 Eckhart, "Sermon 52", p. 202.
 - 68 De Certeau, "White Ecstasy", p. 155.
 - 69 See De Certeau's discussion of Teresa's opening prayer in *Interior Castle: "This discourse is nothing if it is not the other speaking"* (De Certeau, *Heterologies: Discourse on the Other* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1986), p. 94).

- 70 Pseudo-Dionysius, *Mystical Theology*, p. 138.
- 71 This thoughtless thanking would, of course, be the height of thinking.
- 72 Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, p. 146.
- 73 Eckhart, "Sermon 22" in Colledge and McGinn, *SCTD*, p. 196.
- 74 Pseudo-Dionysius, Letter III, in Lubheid (ed), *The Complete Works*, p. 264.
- 75 Augustine (*Sermons on John*) as cited in Eckhart's *Commentary on Exodus*, in McGinn (ed), *Teacher and Preacher*, p. 54.
- 76 Pseudo-Dionysius, *Divine Names*, p. 49.
- 77 St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, ed. D. Bourke (London: Blackfriars, 1975), Q13, Arts 8 and 9; I am indebted to Professor Graham Ward for pointing out this passage.
- 78 Pseudo-Dionysius, *The Divine Names*, p. 68.
- 79 See Marguerite Porete, *Mirror of Simple Souls*, trans. Edmund Colledge, Judith Grant, J. C. Marler (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1999). For a number of excellent essays about Porete's influence on Eckhart, see Bernard McGinn (ed), *Meister Eckhart and the Beguine Mystics*.
- 80 Bernard McGinn, "Introduction: Theological Summary", pp. 37–38.
- 81 Eckhart, "Sermon 10" in McGinn (ed.), *Teacher and Preacher*, p. 265.
- 82 Which one would also have to call identity-itself.
- 83 Eckhart, "Sermon 2" in Colledge and McGinn, (eds), *SCTD*, p. 180.
- 84 Eckhart, "Sermon 15" in *Ibid.*, p. 192.
- 85 Caputo, "Mysticism and Transgression", p. 34.
- 86 Pseudo-Dionysius, *Mystical Theology*, p. 137.
- 87 Eckhart, "Sermon 9" in McGinn (ed), *Teacher and Preacher*, p. 256.
- 88 Eckhart, "Sermon 12" in *Ibid.*, p. 269.
- 89 Eckhart, "Sermon XXIX" in *Ibid.*, p. 266.
- 90 Pseudo-Dionysius, *Mystical Theology*, p. 137; see note 57, above.
- 91 Eckhart, "Sermon XXIX", p. 266.
- 92 Eckhart, "Sermon 6", p. 187.
- 93 Eckhart, *Commentary on Ecclesiasticus*, in McGinn (ed), *Teacher and Preacher*, p. 181.
- 94 See McGinn's extensive discussion of the *in quantum* principle and the Christ/justice example in McGinn, "Introduction: Theological Summary", pp. 24–61.
- 95 Eckhart, "Sermon 5" in M. Walshe (ed), *Sermons and Treatises, Vol. I* (Shaftesbury: Elementary Books, 1987), p. 52.
- 96 William of St. Thierry as cited in Denys Turner, *The Darkness of God*, p. 144.
- 97 Eckhart, "Sermon 58" in Walshe (ed), *Sermons and Treatises, Vol. II* (Shaftesbury: Elementary Books, 1987), p. 89.
- 98 Eckhart, *On Detachment*, p. 285.
- 99 For Hegel, "the divine nature is the same (*dasselbe*) as the human, and it is this unity that is beheld" by Absolute Spirit, knowing itself as self-consciousness itself (G. W. F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A. V. Miller (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977), p. 460).
- 100 See Martin Heidegger, *Schelling's Treatise on Human Freedom*, trans. Joan Stambaugh (London: Harper and Row, 1969) and Heidegger, *Identity and Difference*. Heidegger's main contention with Schelling (as was his contention with Nietzsche, and as is Derrida's (and Marion's) contention with Heidegger) is that Schelling ultimately reinscribes the categories of metaphysics, upholding *Ungrund* as a static Being beyond the differential play of beings. The following gloss on Schelling relies mainly on his *Philosophical Inquiries into the Essence of Human Freedom*, trans. James Gutmann (Chicago, IL: Open Court Publishing Company, 1936).
- 101 Eckhart, *Commentary on Exodus*, p. 81.
- 102 Heidegger, *Schelling's Treatise*, p. 77.
- 103 Schelling, *Philosophical Inquiries into the Nature of Human Freedom*, trans. James Gutmann (Chicago, IL: Open Court Publishing Company, 1936).
- 104 This absolutely irreducible difference, the condition of the non-identical identity that conditions it, prevents the completion of the speculative sentence. As the copula shifts from intransitivity to transitivity, subject and predicate are no longer merely interchangeable; that is, "God is everything", understood as "God is-es everything", is not equivalent to "Everything is(-es) God". This latter sentence would function not equally but analogically, as it does for Eckhart through the soul's participation in Trinitarian inter-creativity (this

- will be discussed momentarily), a participation enabled through the soul's difference from God *toto genere*.
- 105 Heidegger, *Schelling's Treatise*, p. 79.
- 106 Eckhart, *Commentary on Exodus*, p. 46. For an extensive analysis of Heidegger's relationship to Eckhart, see John D. Caputo, *The Mystical Element in Heidegger's Thought* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 1978).
- 107 Eckhart, "Sermon 5b" in Colledge and McGinn (eds), *SCTD*, p. 183.
- 108 Which is why Derrida, endlessly suspicious of bilateral exchange (which, he believes, can only ensnare the parties involved in an antagonistic economy of rivalrous giving), will argue that the gift, to be "pure", cannot even be *received* as-such. See Derrida, *Given Time I: Counterfeit Money*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1992). To locate the only possibility of gift-giving in a haphazard unilateral divestment is, however, to deny the possibility of gift-giving at all. A gift, it seems, could only be possible by virtue of a radically anterior relationality, itself the gift that sustains identity and difference.
- 109 Eckhart, "Sermon 22", p. 194.
- 110 Reiner Schürmann, *Meister Eckhart: Mystic and Philosopher* (Bloomington and Indianapolis, IN: Indiana University Press, 1978), p. 145.
- 111 Eckhart, *Commentary on Exodus*, p. 169.
- 112 Eckhart, "Sermon 4" in McGinn (ed), *Teacher and Preacher*, p. 251. One might call this persistent difference in the identity across ontological difference "analogy".
- 113 Eckhart, "Sermon 10" in *Ibid.*, p. 261.
- 114 De Certeau, *The Mystic Fable*, p. 299.
- 115 Ludwig Feuerbach as cited in Jean-Luc Marion, *God without Being*, p. 16.
- 116 Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York, NY: Vintage Books, 1974), §125.
- 117 While I am borrowing Don Cupitt's phrase to describe the atheist humanist, Cupitt's work falls after the era of "Death of God" theology—even the work that was contemporary with it—and offers a much more complex account of the crises surrounding post-theism.
- 118 Henri DeLubac, *The Drama of Atheist Humanism* (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 1995), p. 70.
- 119 Taylor, *Erring*, p. 104.
- 120 "Postmodernity" itself is an indeterminate designation, signaling a shift from what came before, but refraining from calling itself anything more definite than not-quite-that. Post-modern. Not quite modern, but not really anything else yet. For how could we give our era—never mind our selves—a proper name, without immediately un-saying that name, hyper-conscious of its failure to present the present era?
- 121 Many thanks to Professor Mark C. Taylor, who intended (even anti-intentionalists sometimes intend) that this phrase be read in all its over-determinacy.
- 122 For a much more graceful demonstration of this, see Catherine Pickstock's "Thomas Aquinas and the Quest for the Eucharist", *Modern Theology* Vol. 15 no. 2 (April, 1999), pp. 159–180.
- 123 Jean-Luc Nancy, "Dum Scribo", trans. Ian McLeod, *The Oxford Literary Review* Vol. 3 no. 2 (1978), p. 8.
- 124 Jacques Derrida, "Circumfession" in Geoffrey Bennington and Jacques Derrida, *Jacques Derrida* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1993), p. 154.
- 125 Derrida, "How to Avoid Speaking", p. 77.
- 126 Eckhart, "Sermon 15", p. 189.
- 127 Søren Kierkegaard, *Repetition*, trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1983), p. 186.
- 128 The pseudonyms talked best about repetition when they seemed not to be talking about repetition; see Kierkegaard, "Eulogy on Abraham" in Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (trans), *Fear and Trembling* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1983), pp. 15–24, 38–40.
- 129 Johannes de Silentio (Søren Kierkegaard), *Fear and Trembling*, p. 16.
- 130 Heidegger, *Schelling's Treatise*, pp. 122–123.
- 131 Pseudo-Dionysius, *The Divine Names*, p. 53.